

Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth Field Hearing

September 21, 2002
DRAFT ORAL STATEMENT
MICROSOFT CORPORATION

Members of the Committee, thank you for including Microsoft in this discussion today. Microsoft approaches these important issues by: providing good pay and benefits to our workforce; requiring major suppliers to meet responsible contracting standards; investing in communities to support connectivity and digital skills; and providing multiple pathways to good careers in the technology industry.

Our employees are our greatest asset, and that is why Microsoft strives to provide good wages and benefits to workers. We also require major suppliers to live up to responsible contractor standards. This includes providing paid sick days for employees to care for themselves or an ill family member and offering 12 weeks (about 3 months) of paid parental leave to care for a new child. Microsoft was able to support hourly employees of contractors who provide services for our Puget Sound facilities that were closed during the pandemic. And Microsoft and our major suppliers agree not to pay sub-minimum wages to individuals with disabilities.

Microsoft is fortunate to be able to do these things. But one size does not fit all, and many employers cannot afford to provide these benefits on their own. That is why it is critical that government and private sector work together to find solutions that benefit all workers. Everyone gets sick or has family members who need care, but people have drastically different benefits depending on where they work or where they live. The patchwork of laws not only is hard on workers and families, but it is also increasingly challenging for an employer like us that operates in all 50 states.

We urge policymakers to work with employers and figure out how policies can ensure protections but also provide flexibility and simplicity for employers to comply with the law and provide these vital benefits to workers across the country.

Another crucial area for private sector - government cooperation is bridging the digital divide and providing people with basic digital skills. By some estimates three-quarters of job openings require at least basic digital skills, but as many as *one in three U.S. workers has low or no digital skills*. To address these gaps and ensure widespread opportunity and economic growth, communities need digital connectivity, access to quality technology education and skills training, and job opportunities.

At Microsoft, we try to help across a continuum of people's lives.

We invest in the tech pipeline from the beginning, at the K-12 level. For example, our Technology Education and Literacy or TEALS program—through which volunteers partner with teachers to stand up computer science classes in hundreds of high schools each year—has enabled 93,000 students to take a computer science high school class. Over 50% of participating schools are Title 1 schools.

We support alternate pathways into the technology industry, including through apprenticeship, programs for transitioning military veterans and spouses and investments in community college programs. For example, Microsoft's Datacenter Academy is a partnership with community colleges in rural areas where datacenters are located. We provide technology and expertise, scholarships and mentorship for students, as well as internship and connections to job opportunities in their

communities. Participants in the Academy can, in less than a year, gain an in-demand technology certificate that positions them for jobs at datacenters or elsewhere in IT.

Reaching communities that have traditionally been less represented in technology, including communities in smaller cities across the country and communities of color. [Additional examples to follow here.]

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's roundtable and for the Committee's work on this topic. I look forward to the discussion.